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ABSTRACT

The language community of urban Hispanics in the United States and educational strategies that are appropriate for teaching English as a second language (ESL) in a bilingual/bidialectal language situation are considered. Within the New York City Hispanic community of Puerto Ricans, several varieties of English have been noted: standard English, local vernaculars of New York City, Black English, and other language varieties that represent a continuum of formal standard to informal nonstandard language. Observing the written English of ESL students can be important in creating effective teaching strategies. Differences from standard English may be placed into three traditional style groups: lexical, syntactic, and spelling. In addition, three factors may be considered regarding the student's mastery of standard English: (1) knowledge of standard English form; (2) the stage of second language acquisition, including transfer from Spanish and interlanguage; and (3) assimilation of nonstandard English form. The application of this approach is illustrated using a written English sample produced by a fourth-grade Hispanic student in an ESL class. It is concluded that by distinguishing among students' linguistic choices that are based on different strategies, teachers can better evaluate student output and the influences on English ability, which will enable proper diagnosis, assessment, and teaching approaches. (SW)

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TEACHING ESL IN A BILINGUAL/BIDIALECTAL LANGUAGE SITUATION

Paper presented at the Twelfth Annual Conference of New York State English to Speakers of Other Languages and Bilingual Educators Association, Albany, New York, October 29-31, 1982

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TEACHING ESL IN A BILINGUAL/BIDIALECTAL LANGUAGE SITUATION

The ESL teacher's choice of appropriate teaching techniques is more complex within a bilingual/bidialectal language situation than within a "simple" bilingual one. In urban areas of the United States this bilingual/bidialectal situation is hardly unique, yet little attention has been given to appropriate educational strategies within this context.

Bilingual/bidialectal Hispanic children who are in the process of acquiring English as a second language have been found to produce English language forms which are influenced by both native language forms and by nonstandard English forms encountered outside of the classroom (Campbell, et al., 1972; Williams, 1972; Johnson et al., 1976). It is therefore, of utmost importance for the ESL teacher to be aware that he or she may be confronted with the task of teaching a second language (English), while simultaneously teaching a second dialect (standard English). After discussing the language contact situation, implications for the ESL classroom will be suggested by examining the written English of a Hispanic child in New York City. One way of examining the linguistic choices made by this child will be presented.

The Language Community

The language community of urban Hispanics in the United States consists of varying degrees of bilingualism and bidialectalism. Within the New York City Hispanic community of Puerto Ricans several varieties of English have been noted: standard

English, local vernaculars of New York City, Black English, "the speech of Puerto Ricans raised speaking English," and varieties of Spanish-English code-switching (Pedraza et al., 1980, p. 31). These language varieties do not actually exist within individual categories, but must be viewed along a continuum of formal standard to informal nonstandard language. They both overlap with each other and vary in the speech of an individual, depending on the speaker's linguistic repertoire and the specific context.

Relevance to the Classroom

The teacher's awareness of the influences upon the English acquired by his or her students would seem to be an important step in effectively creating teaching strategies. By differentiating between those English forms which result from a stage of language acquisition, including interlanguage and transfer from Spanish, and those forms which result from assimilation of nonstandard English, the teacher might more sensitively and successfully approach students' linguistic choices.

ESL students might feel unsure of those forms of their English which reflect a stage of second language acquisition, or interlanguage and transfer from Spanish. However, they might not perceive the nonstandard English forms which they have assimilated as being nonstandard language.

Describing Students' Linguistic Choices

One way of describing the linguistic choices in the written English of a Hispanic child who is in the process of acquiring English will be described. Written language was

looked at because of the two literacy skills, it seems that writing may present "more of a problem" in the teaching of students who speak a nonstandard dialect (Alexander, 1980, p.575). By observing the written English of ESL students, a simple classification which the teacher can use, was formed.

Two steps are suggested to the teacher while examining the students' work. First, differences from standard English are observed and placed into three traditional style groups: lexical, syntactic, and spelling. The lexical group refers to vocabulary. The syntactic group refers to grammatical structures. The spelling group includes all misspellings; therefore, in some cases it reflects phonological differences from standard English and it may also actually include certain syntactic differences from standard English (i.e., use of base form of the verb rather than S-form in the third person singular of the present tense).

Next, the cause for each linguistic choice is suggested by looking at influences upon the writer's language. Although in many cases it is not possible to tell with certainty the strategy used in producing a linguistic choice, categories were formed by observing the written work of ESL students. Three factors are considered to relate to the students' mastery of standard English:

1. Knowledge of standard English form, appearance of writing error which native English speaking students might make as well.
2. Stage of second language acquisition, including transfer from Spanish and interlanguage.
3. Assimilation of nonstandard English form.

Observing the Linguistic Choices

The following sample of English was written by a fourth grade student in his ESL class. The student, Robert, although born in the United States, was raised in Colombia by his grandparents. He began third grade in a New York City public school when he returned to New York City to live with his Spanish speaking parents. In school, Robert has contact with other Hispanics, Greeks, Italians, Orientals, Anglos, and Blacks. It appears that members of this language community use some colloquialized nonstandard forms of English.

My Hobbies

When I go home I like to see T.V. May be it is good for me or is a homework of sciene. Oh, I like to macke paper things like ships, planes, frogs, etc. I like to go to the movies. I like to do exersice becouse is good for the person and visit my friends and play the drum and play baseball and socer and my sister help macke the food.

By applying the method discussed above for describing students' linguistic choices, the following may be said about Robert's composition.

A lexical difference might be considered "...see T.V." since a native speaker would usually say "watch T.V." In Spanish, Robert says "veo televisión," directly translated into English as "I see television." Therefore, this lexical difference probably results from category 2., a stage of second language acquisition.

A syntactic difference might be considered "...becouse is good for..." since the subject "it" is omitted. This

syntactic difference also reflects the influence of Spanish and is therefore considered to result from category 2.

Robert uses "invented spelling" strategies, or what Carol Chomsky (1973, p.1) describes as the child's spontaneous and creative formation of words according to combinations that he perceives and feels are "worthy of representation." Examples of this are seen in the spellings "macke," "exersice," "becouse," and "socer." These spellings show that Robert has knowledge of the standard English form of the words, category 1. The spelling "sciene" is also considered as category 1., knowledge of the standard English form. This spelling most likely results from failure of the student to self-correct his work. The written form of language does not always reflect the oral form (Whiteman, 1976).

Other spellings reflect Robert's oral English, suggesting both phonological and also what are actually certain syntactic differences from standard English. These differences are considered as categories 2. and 3., as described above. The spelling of "helps," the third person singular of the present tense, as "help," may be considered under category 2. or category 3. By having Robert read his composition aloud, it was confirmed that the dropping of the "s" was not a result of failure to self-correct, since Robert did not pronounce the "s." In this case a stage of second language acquisition would be manifested in the same form as assimilation of nonstandard English, considered by Wolfram (1974) to be "convergent processes." Therefore, it is difficult to determine what effects Robert's linguistic choice.

Although confusion with ones native language orthography might present additional spelling differences, this does not seem to be apparent in Robert's writing. Also, no discussion of code-switching seems necessary. Robert is in the process of acquiring English as a second language and he does not seem to code-switch between Spanish and English, a skill described a characteristic of truly bilingual speakers (Poplack, 1979).

Implications

The examination of factors that influence the written English of students seems to be an important step in facilitating development of skills. Similarities and differences can be seen between the writing of a native standard English speaking child and a child such as Robert, who is acquiring English as a second language and assimilating nonstandard forms simultaneously. Determination of whether or not nonstandard forms have been assimilated is of importance in deciding upon teaching methods, and in distinguishing between a child who is in need of an ESL class and a child who may be fluent in his own dialect of nonstandard English.

Although the influence of Robert's native language is clearly evident, the effect of nonstandard English is far more subtle, especially at this level of second language acquisition. The comparison of Robert's language to that of his native English speaking classmates may be necessary in order to discover if they use nonstandard forms which he uses. This might show if he might have assimilated forms from them. Such a comparison might also be made with Robert's out of

school contacts. It may also be that Robert's use of nonstandard English forms is influenced by the notion of "covert prestige," or assimilation of nonstandard forms because of favorable attitudes toward them (Poplack, 1978).

Summary

A way for teachers to examine the written English of ESL students has been suggested. By distinguishing amongst linguistic choices which are based upon different strategies, a clearer picture of a student's output is observed. With an awareness and thorough understanding of influences upon the English of students, proper diagnosis, assessment, and teaching techniques can be developed.

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